

State is at the forefront of new federal strategies

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For just one day on April 27, Myrtle Beach's Grand Strand Senior Center morphed from a place where thousands of the area's older adults go for recreation, fellowship, classes and volunteer opportunities into a set for a major television production by the Retirement Living Television Network.

The South Carolina Lt. Governor's Office on Aging's 2007 Leadership Summit, "A Call to Action," started off with a bang, with RLTV host and former NBC Today Show anchorman John Palmer moderating a wide-ranging discussion about the future of aging in South Carolina and the nation that included Lt. Governor André Bauer, head of the state's Office on Aging; U.S. Assistant Secretary for Aging Josefina Carbonell, head of the U.S. Administration on Aging (AoA) as well as local Aging program leaders from diverse areas of the state including Spartanburg, Sumter, Aiken and Charleston.

The summit meeting was put together by the Lt. Governor's Office on Aging primarily to help inform the network of regional, county and local community that deliver services funded in part by federal programs about some major changes to the way these programs will be structured and funded in the future.

The federal plan for "re-aligning" systems of long term care for the elderly and disabled is known as Choices for Independence, and South Carolina is well ahead of the curve among the states in preparing for the demographic tsunami represented by the nation's 78 million plus baby boomers who are now entering their retirement years, according to Assistant

Secretary Carbonell.

"South Carolina, under the leadership of Lt. Governor Bauer, is doing some terrific things to prepare for the aging boom," Carbonell told the audience of approximately 200, specifically outlining some of the state's successes in implementing Choices for Independence-mandated pilot projects using federal grants from the AOA and state projects focusing on research and recruitment of geriatric physicians.

One of those state projects is the South Carolina Senior's Cube, a research project that has put South Carolina at the cutting edge of outcomes-based research into senior health by using statistical data to track and monitor the health care outcomes of seniors. The Senior's Cube database project is a collaboration between the Lt. Governor's Office on Aging, the State Office of Research and Statistics and USC's Arnold School of Public Health funded by a grant from the Duke Endowment. Assistant Secretary Carbonell announced that on May 1, the AoA would recognize the Senior's Cube project as a national "best practices" model for other states to emulate during Older Americans Month.

"The first 'State Champion' to be recognized in this way will be South Carolina's Senior's Cube program," said Carbonell.

"South Carolina is moving towards greater accountability through our efforts to use data to help state policy makers," said Lt. Governor Bauer. "The Senior's Cube will help our state policymakers and researchers target how best to use limited tax resources to invest in those services which allow our older citizens to re-

main at home and avoid more costly publicly-funded institutional services."

That effort to help seniors remain independent through increased access to a wide range of home- and community-based services is at the heart of the Choices for Independence.

One way that is being accomplished in South Carolina is through the creation of federally funded Aging Disability Resource Centers (ADRCs), which serve as high profile clearinghouses of information and assistance - a single entry point where seniors and their caregivers can access any and all services available to them, whether government programs, private-for pay services and non-profit or volunteer programs.

Lynnda Bassham, Human Services Director for the Lower Savannah Area Agency on Aging in Aiken, told the audience how her first-in-the-state ADRC project is helping seniors and other disabled adults in Aiken, Allendale, Bamberg, Barnwell, Calhoun and Orangeburg counties.

"Our Lt. Governor's Office on Aging has been great giving us the flexibility to go beyond some of the traditional ways we have delivered services," said Bassham, describing her agency's recent partnering with faith-based organizations. "This initiative is already benefiting seniors in our area."

In addition to Bassham, host John Palmer also directed questions to Janet Schumacher, coordinator for the Mayor's Office of Aging and Disabilities in the city of Charleston, Senior Centers of Spartanburg County Executive Director Nancy Ogle and Santee-Lynches Council of Governments Executive Director Jim Darby.

"These are the real leaders

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of Aging in South Carolina," said Carbonell, pointing to indicate the Summit participants in the audience.

"That's why they're here. We've heard from all the different levels involved in this [senior services and aging policy] today, and I want to tell you I am very excited about what is happening in South Carolina."

AoA Deputy Director John Wren agreed with that assessment. Speaking during the panel discussions that followed the television taping, Wren told the audience that preparation and initiative by South Carolina's Aging Network during the last three years has positioned the state well.

"The ADRC's are a key component of 'Choices for Independence,'" said Wren.

"South Carolina has been one of the pioneers in this area, and you are just doing a terrific job."

Wren also told a group of the state's Regional Area Agency on Aging Directors at the Summit that what they were accomplishing in South Carolina would enable the state to take advantage of additional federal grant programs such as "Community Living Incentives," a pilot project that will provide funds directly to individuals at risk of going into a nursing home so that they can purchase services that will allow them to stay in their

homes longer – a concept similar to the state's Community Long Term Care waiver for Medicaid-funded services.

It's designed to bring more consumer-direction into the picture of Aging services, as well as saving healthcare dollars in the long run by delaying entry into nursing homes for the people who participate.

"We [AoA] are very hopeful that we're going to get some additional funding to implement this program [on a pilot basis]," said Wren, "and states like South Carolina, with strong consumer-driven programs already in place, will be at the top of the list."



Lt. Governor André Bauer and U.S. Assistant Secretary for Aging Josefina Carbonell lead the discussion on the future of long term care and the responsibilities the government should share.